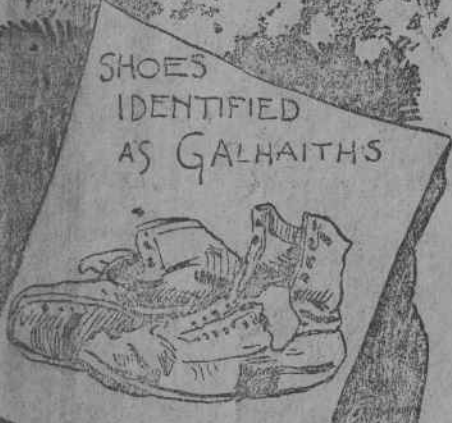


FAMILY OF FIENDS



Chose a Home in the Midst of a Deserted Mining Region and Used the Old Shafts as Ready-Made Graves.

Cora Staffleback's Statement.

To the Editor of the Journal:
I first met George Staffleback in 1892, when I was fourteen years old, and married him a few weeks later, in July of that year. I did not know anything about the Staffleback family then, but afterward learned a great deal.

Very soon after our marriage I began to see and hear things which horrified me. In terror I spoke of my suspicions to Annie McCombs, who lived nearby.

When the old woman heard I had told her she came to my bed at night with a big corn knife in her hand. I was awakened by persons talking, and saw George and old Mrs. Staffleback standing by the bed. The old woman had the corn knife in her hand and said: "Had I better kill her, George?" But George objected, and I was not killed. George told me if I did not keep my mouth shut I would be killed and thrown into an old mining shaft. This taught me a lesson, and I kept silent after that.

There was a great deal going on at the house that I did not see, and did not want to see, and what things I saw I kept to myself. I was always afraid I would be killed. They watched me very closely, and when I talked to Annie McCombs or anybody outside of the family I was harassed and threatened for it. When we moved to Galena it was worse, and when Charley Wilson began living with old Mrs. Staffleback I was kept in constant dread. Mike, who was the gamest one of the boys, had just served out a term in the Missouri Penitentiary for stealing a suit of clothes. Wilson had also served a term in the penitentiary for obtaining money under false pretences.

I had heard the boys and old woman often talk of killing and robbing people, but never saw them kill anybody until the night the two girls were killed. I saw them run the pedler out the door in his underclothes and heard a shot fired, but never saw him again.

The boys told the old woman his body was down a shaft, and they divided some of his jewelry and said they had buried the rest. It was nearly two years ago when I saw Mike and Ed Staffleback throw the two girls down the shaft. George and I sneaked out to see what they were going to do, and he was sitting down on a little hill and I was stooping over beside him when the bodies of the girls were thrown down the deep shaft. I was very badly frightened, but did not say a word.

When the two bodies had been dropped down the old mining shaft George said: "Don't you ever say a word about this or you'll get me into trouble, too." I promised not to tell it, and I never told it to a soul until after the Stafflebacks were convicted of murdering Galbraith. I was even afraid to look into that shaft, and would shudder to think that I might be put there, too.

The old woman said she was a medium and witch, and if I ever told about anything I saw she would hoodoo me. I was more afraid of her than I was of the boys. The boys and Wilson were all afraid of the old woman, too. Whenever anybody would make her mad she would get her old corn knife, which hung at the head of her bed. It was larger than any butcher knife I ever saw, and the old woman knew how to handle it.

(Signed) CORA STAFFLEBACK.

In this incubating process the Stafflebacks learn many things. They learn that no policeman dare venture into the neighborhood after nightfall. They learn the feasibility of dragging dead bodies to the pits and tumbling them in without fear of detection. They learn the extreme unlikelihood of subsequent inquiries.

In time an addition of boards was built to the log hut. It being too small to accommodate the family and its visitors. And then another man drifted into the gang. It was Charles Wilson, who passed as the husband of Mother Nance. He was a worthy recruit, being as bestial a desperado as his colleagues.

During the first year of "Mother Nance's" regime on Pickers Point, there were two mysterious disappearances of miners who had drawn their pay on Saturday and had failed to report for work on the following Monday. These disappearances excited but little comment, either among the citizens or among the miners. "Probably gone away" to work somewhere else was the only comment.

One day Ed and Mike Staffleback came home with two young girls, whom they had induced to leave some emigrant wagons passing through the town. Then the Staffleback house became livelier than ever. One of the girls was named Alice and the other Lilly.

After this there were more robberies and burglaries, and Mother Nance and her family appeared to have enough money to live on comfortably.

About 7 o'clock one June evening, two years ago, some visitors came to the Staffleback house. Mike and Ed were absent. The men began to talk to the two young girls, in the presence of Mother Nance and George. At midnight Mike and Ed, who had been on some robbery expedition, came home and found the visitors still there. They raised a row and the men went away. Alice was lying on the bed.

Mike Staffleback took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves and made preparations that the family seemed to understand.

ly and then lay still. Then the brute walked over to the corner of the room, got a club and struck the unconscious girl a fearful blow on the temple. Fearing that she would bleed on the bed, he pulled her to the floor and struck her again and again, until she was dead.

When Mike first grabbed Alice, Lilly began to scream. Ed Staffleback rushed savagely upon her, grabbed her by the throat, and kept a tight grip on her neck during the entire time that Mike was killing her companion.

When Mike had finished with Alice, Lilly, too, was dead. In the meantime Mother Nance had sat quietly looking on. Only once did she speak, and then it was to admonish the "boys" to be careful and not to upset the lamp.

After murdering the two girls, the murderers wrapped the bodies in sheets and rolled them under the bed. Here they lay for an hour or two, until the Stafflebacks thought the coast was clear. Then they began preparations for the disposition of the bodies.

George Staffleback and Cora, his wife, not having any hand in this particular crime, went outside to watch the proceedings. They occupied a seat on a little knoll some distance from the house.

In a short time the door of the Staffleback house opened and Mike appeared carrying a white bundle on his shoulder. He was followed by Ed carrying a similar bundle.

With noiseless steps the two men bore their spectral burdens down the dump to the old shaft. Mike laid the one he was carrying on the dump and helped his brother, Ed took the body by the head and Mike by the heels and swung it over into the pit. George and Cora, sitting on the little hill, could hear far down the shaft the deep-thumped as the body struck the water. The other bundle was also swung over, and all the Stafflebacks went into the house and to bed.

The next day several of the women became scared and left the house. A few nights afterward Mike Staffleback told Mother Nance that it would be a good plan to remove the bodies, as somebody might see them floating. On the following night Mike removed the bodies to some safe spot, and up to the present time they have not been located.

Other women came to live at Mother Nance's house and the orgies on Pickers Point went on.

One night about two months after the murder of the two girls, a Jewish pedler made a visit to the Staffleback House. He called to see a woman named Trixie who formerly lived in Springfield, Mo.

He had a pedler's pack with him. When he arrived Cora Staffleback and Mother Nance were getting supper.

The pedler gave Trixie a breastpin, some beads and a scarfpin. When the pedler retired the Stafflebacks saw him shove his pocketbook under his pillow. Mike Staffleback, with a cold eye to business, remarked: "You must have a lot of money, there."

"About \$15," the pedler replied. After awhile everybody went to bed except Mike, Ed and George Staffleback. For about an hour they watched and waited. Then Mike slipped over to the bed where the pedler was asleep and tried to pull the coat out from under his head.

The pedler, being a light sleeper, sprang up and drew a pistol. Mike knocked it from his hand. Then the pedler ran out of the house and down the road, with the three Stafflebacks after him.

In a few moments there came the sound of a shot. Then all was silent. In about half an hour the three Stafflebacks came back to the house. They had the pedler's pocketbook.

They stood around the table and divided the money, and finally quarrelled over it. When they got through quarrelling they took the pedler's pack and threw it into the shaft where they had thrown the body. They did not return to the house until near morning.

A few days afterward the woman Trixie left the house, saying that she wanted to go before anybody else was killed.

And so the pits around Pickers Point gradually became tenanted.

cargo of miner's whiskey, went to the house as instructed. The night was windy and the sky was full of flying clouds that partially obscured the moon.

Galbraith followed the road that winds in and out among the dumps, until he located the lair of Mother Nance. He knocked. Mother Nance came to the door. "You can't come in here," she said; "go about your business." Poor Galbraith went away and drank some more whiskey. At 2 o'clock he returned.

Again Mother Nance came to the door, dishevelled and irate. "I want to see Emma," said Galbraith, who was very drunk.

"I tell you ye can't come in. Clean out, you fool!"

Inside the room were Emma and Josie Beck, Charlie Wilson and George Staffleback. Ed Staffleback was sleeping in a shed near the house. Mother Nance always kept a corn knife, which is something like a Cuban machete, near the bed.

The old woman grabbed this weapon and ran Galbraith away from the door. "I'll cut your d—d head off," she screamed; "go for him, boys."

This acted on the old crone's brood as the blast of the horn to a pack of bloodhounds.

"I'll get him," shouted Wilson, grabbing his revolver and starting after the fleeing Galbraith. He was followed closely by George and Ed Staffleback, and the three assistants pressed the running miner closely.

Behind the quartet came Mother Nance, Cora Staffleback and a woman named Ann McCombs, who lived in the house. Fifty yards down the road, Wilson fired at the drunk, but now thoroughly scared man, and missed. Then Ed Staffleback fired and Galbraith put his hand to his side and staggered.

In twenty yards more he fell, but got right up again and ran on. He was so drunk that he could not run very fast, and Ed Staffleback ran up and put his revolver to Galbraith's head and fired.

Galbraith threw his hand to his head, whirled around and sank to his hands and knees. Mother Nance, who had been running very fast with her corn knife, now came up and handed it to Ed. He slashed it savagely across Galbraith's neck and the deed was done.

At this moment Ann McCombs came up and grabbing Ed by the arm said: "Don't kill the man."

"Let me alone or I'll cut your throat, too," snarled Ed. Then he handed the knife to Mother Nance, who wiped it on her apron.

The two women, Cora and Ann, felt sick, and went away and lay down in some weeds. Presently one of them revived and peered out at the group in the road. "They're pulling his clothes off," she whispered. The other looked.

Ed had taken the dead man by the shoulders. George Staffleback took one leg and Wilson the other. They carried him to an old shaft and threw him in. The listening girls heard the splashes just as they had heard many other splashes of a similar nature. Then they went back to the house.

In about an hour Ed Staffleback came in and asked for some clean clothes. When he had got them and put them on, they all sat around the table and had a banquet of chile.

This was the last murder known to have been committed by these inhuman degenerates. A month later, on July 20, a stranger passing along the purlieus of Pickers Point stopped and, after the manner of strangers, peered down one of the old deserted shafts.

He saw a body floating on the surface of the green, scummy water far below. It was recovered and was identified as that of Galbraith.

The entire brood, with the exception of Mike, who was absent when the Galbraith murder was committed, were brought to trial ten days ago. Mrs. Staffleback and George chose to be tried together. Ed took a severance. George and Ed Staffleback are to be hanged by the neck until they are dead. Charles Wilson and Mother Nance will go to prison for life.

Of the entire gang the old woman is by far the most interesting. She is the brains of the family. She is crafty and keen and sixty-five years old. Under a mild demeanor she conceals the fury of a devil.

During her trial she was interviewed by a reporter. When asked how she felt at the prospect of lifelong imprisonment she said:

"If it is God's will, I am resigned," and a tear trickled from her eye. "I was raised a Christian, and, thank God, I have always been true to my raising. I used to teach a class in the Sunday school of the Spring River Church. I am a Baptist, like my mother. If the boys have turned out bad, it is against my teaching. I have always made it a rule all my life to pray every night before I go to bed, and I taught all my children to do the same. If they have done wrong, let them suffer for their crimes, but, before God, I am innocent. Of course, if they are hanged I will be sorry for them, but I will pray for the salvation of their souls. God's will be done."

